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ABSTRACT

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**Teaching Classroom Management:
A Stand-Alone Necessity for Preparing New Teachers**

by

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Abstract

This paper presents several arguments for including a stand-alone course on classroom management in every teacher preparation program. Some teacher preparation programs do not offer any class in classroom management, while others offer classroom management as an elective or as a topic embedded into another course. In the latter situation, the course instructors typically have expertise in the primary topic and not in classroom management. Because of limited time and a lack of knowledge on the part of instructors, typically the management strategies taught often are quick and easy systems of rewards and punishment. Either approach does a disservice to future teachers as well as to the cultural, emotional, and special needs and interests of students they will teach. Teacher preparation programs must teach classroom management as a discreet topic and they must make the effort to employ instructors who have expertise in that area.

Introduction

A lot of people are pretty sure they know how teachers should be prepared for our public schools. Legislators in many states seem to hold the belief that anyone can teach, that minimal time for professional training is required, and that a workforce of teachers large enough to fill the current shortage can be developed if there are sufficient alternative routes available for certification. The common theme uniting these perspectives is time—get more teachers into our schools as fast as possible.

Legislators have sought to reverse the teacher shortage by handing down laws on how teachers will be prepared and the time allotted for that preparation. When time is short, it is inevitable that some important parts of the professional preparation framework must be dismantled or the attention paid to them must be drastically reduced. The topic that consistently suffers such treatment is Classroom Management.

The Skills All Teachers Need

Effective classroom management strategies that address individual needs while protecting the interests of the learning community comprise, without a doubt, the most valuable skill set a teacher can have. While experienced teachers insist classroom management is the most important class a new teacher should take, it is often the class most likely to be left out of truncated teacher education programs.

The absence of classroom management or the reduced attention paid to it is really not a new phenomenon, the trend has been discussed and documented for over 20 years. The research reported in this paper mirrors at least two other studies, one that was completed about 10 years ago and another that was reported about 20 years ago. (Rickman and Hollowell, 1981& Wesley and Vocke, 1992) The 1992 study examined 111 university catalogs for the course listings of various teacher education

programs. It found that only 27% of the program listings in those catalogs "contained course titles with the wording [discipline, control, behavior, or management] at either the early childhood, elementary, or secondary levels." (Wesley & Vocke, 1992)

I recently conducted my own survey of teacher education programs by reviewing the websites of approximately 20 teacher education programs. I reviewed the sites of universities that are large and small, public and private, well known and not well known, and located in various parts of the United States. The sites typically contain information about the programs as well as lists of required courses. I found that the course offerings for teacher preparation generally included methods for teaching academic content, such as Language Arts, as well as seminars in professional development. Of the programs I reviewed, I found that only one (Stanford University) included a course specifically titled "Classroom Management" among its offerings. Some course descriptions, particularly those that were upper division seminars, talked about including discussions of classroom organization or communication strategies, but there was no direct mention of management strategies.

Finding courses on classroom management proved to be more difficult than I had originally imagined. I began to draw the conclusion that the term "Classroom Management" is coded or couched in euphemisms. In reviewing the sites and trying to decipher course descriptions that might be addressing classroom management, I felt as if I had become some sort of detective. I was trying to decode course descriptions to see if perhaps obscure phrases such as "promote learning by modeling understanding" were being used to secretly convey the fact that classroom management strategies would actually be included in the topics discussed.

For instance, one university described a senior seminar as including "the opportunity to consider issues in education and their impact on schools...to reflect on your experiences as a practice teacher...to examine the effectiveness of your work." The activities for the seminar included having students "Describe a classroom environment that is conducive to learning and outline how that environment can be achieved and maintained." I suspect that this phrase means the course will address classroom management. The problem is that the vague language used to describe management strategies could also be conveying that any sort of management is acceptable. In other words, it is unclear what the response would be if students were to declare that the only environment conducive to learning is absolute silence and the way to achieve and maintain that environment is through fear and intimidation. Given the range of needs and issues impacting young people today, it does not serve our pre-service students well to dance around issues of management. "...when educating teachers about classroom management, it seems likely that meaningful behavior change will be enhanced by including discussions about underlying beliefs related to issues of power, control, and authority and about teachers' instructional and management goals and the congruence between [the two.]" (Jones, 1996) The dynamics of student/teacher interactions must be addressed head on—obfuscation can only lead to a misunderstanding of how critical this topic is. Course descriptions of this nature may make it seem as if the content will be intellectually stimulating, but future teachers need to clearly understand how the very real needs of young people must be the basis for decisions about what actually constitutes an optimal learning environment.

Another concern became evident as I visited the various websites. I found that if there was any mention of a course in classroom management among these programs, it was typically situated in the Special Education program offerings. However, the management systems being taught are overwhelmingly behaviorist in nature. It would appear from the course descriptions that these programs are suggesting that the only students who act out in school are those with special needs and they can only be controlled with some combination of punishments and rewards. The dismissive and even prejudicial thinking embedded in such sweeping generalities reveals an incredible lack of understanding as to the needs of the great majority of young people classified under the umbrella term of Special Needs. Associating classroom management only with those who are classified as having special needs denies the mainstream students access to fair and reasonable management practices. If all teachers are not taught how to manage fairly, it is a reasonably certain assumption that they won't. The result is a failure to understand the ways in which teachers can use reasoning, fairness and high expectations to manage all children. (Nimmo, 1998)

Coding Classroom Management

It would seem, after perusing those websites, that classroom management is somehow not worthy of mention as a course of study, or perhaps it is considered to be a term that is embarrassing to use, or perhaps it is a topic utterly devalued by those who prepare teachers. While I am sure my fellow educators would deny such assumptions, the preponderance of evidence seems to support the idea.

If I were to speculate as to the reason for this, I would lay the blame at the feet of those who, in our time, have made their fortunes convincing teachers, school

administrators, and parents that classroom management can and should be reduced to a set of proscribed steps that require little thought and are designed to teach blind obedience. The management models they promote typically reflect behaviorist thinking, in that they rely on rewards and punishments control students. Even Glasser's ideas that originally were grounded in counseling strategies have been appropriated into systems of management that have students wearing badges declaring they are "Self-Managers" and earning privileges or losing privileges based on their actions. Counseling strategies are largely absent from these adaptations of what was once a very humane approach to management.

Regardless of the origins of the models, they share a common attribute of being "teacher proof," with the denigrating implication that teachers are not capable of employing or teaching mediation, conflict resolution, anger management or any other indicators of adult, moral behavior. These packaged management models also share the characteristic of appealing to the lowest levels of Kohlberg's Model of Moral Development. Students are taught to behave for the sole purpose of receiving a reward. Misbehaviors are addressed with public humiliation, loss of privileges, and young people being exiled from their peers. As we think about the young men who tragically have turned violent in our schools, one of their shared characteristics is a sense of being picked on and isolated. We have to ask ourselves where that all might begin.

What Is Meant By "It Works?"

The justification offered by those who adopt these models is that they are "quick and dirty" and that they "work." That anything "quick and dirty" would find

its way into education is appalling and the justification of "It works," never addresses the question of "It works towards what end?" Anything can work. Yelling, intimidation, and humiliation can all "work" towards quieting students, but they "work" towards what end? What is learned about appropriate adult behavior when students are subjected to such treatment on a daily basis? What is learned about kindness, respect, and caring? What is learned about humanity?

The term "works" can carry an even more insidious hegemonic meaning. Often new, inexperienced teachers will reject the idea of using management practices that are inclusive and democratic by saying "That all sounds very good, but it wouldn't work with my students." On closer examination, it is typically students of color, students with disabilities, and students from low-income homes to whom teachers are referring. Teachers rarely hesitate to try democratic approaches to management with students generally believed to be "the good kids," who typically come from upper middle class homes, are typically Caucasian, and who typically have access to the privileges of their class and race. (Finn, 1999)

Given the wide-spread use of management models that rely on low levels of cognitive reasoning and moral development, it is little wonder that classroom management has been devalued to the point of not even being discussed in so many teacher education programs. Since these commercially profitable management models are so widespread, it is little wonder that so many teacher educators apparently have bought into the idea that classroom management is really just a "bag of tricks" that can be acquired by new teachers as they begin their careers. That sort of thinking allows

programs to all but ignore the topic, absolving teacher educators of their responsibility to fully prepare new teachers.

The Perils of Ignoring Classroom Management

But great damage is done to the spirit of new teachers and their students when a lack of preparation results in classrooms becoming arenas for daily power struggles. Given the range of needs, cultures, classes, and interests present in any public school classroom today, teacher education programs do little to adequately prepare their students for the classrooms awaiting them when they abdicate sharing their professional expertise in favor of whatever strategies their students might acquire in the "real world." But this seems to be the message teacher education programs are conveying when their offerings are focused on subject matter competency with a couple of seminars addressing "school climate" or "classroom communication" or "social interactions" thrown in if time allows.

When states mandate that teachers must be prepared within certain time constraints, as in California where all teacher education programs must be completed in 12 months, teacher educators may feel they have done an adequate job if their students graduate with some sense of how to develop curriculum, some depth of knowledge in academic content areas, and perhaps some understanding that the act of teaching has an enormous impact on the lives of students and their families. "While subject matter knowledge is important, research consistently indicates that knowledge of how to teach is an equally powerful factor in teacher effectiveness and in some cases bears an even stronger relationship to teacher performance and student learning." (Darling-Hammond, 2000) Mastery of academic content is critically

important, but future teachers must also be able to facilitate learning in ways that are not only effective but also empathetic.

If equitable management practices are not being employed, the learning environments will inevitably favor only those young people whose needs, learning styles, and interests are a match with the way the classroom is being run. Those who are not a match often receive failing grades, are suspended, or are even expelled. When students are alienated from their learning communities they not only miss learning necessary academics but they also lose an opportunity to gain the decision-making abilities needed to manage their own behaviors. In our public schools the culture, language, and special needs of our young people are likely to be the overwhelming determiners as to whether or not they will fit into any given classroom structure. Statistics on drop-out rates, suspensions and expulsions all reflect the fact that classrooms and schools are being managed in ways that are least forgiving to those students who fall outside whatever has been deemed to be the mainstream culture.

Embedding Classroom Management Into Other Courses

In some cases classroom management has not been eliminated, but the attention paid to it is minimal. This is done most commonly by embedding classroom management into other courses. Initially, such an approach may appear to make sense. Classroom management, in the real world of our public schools, certainly does not exist as an entity apart from the general ebb and flow of classroom interactions. However, on closer examination, this minimalist approach to classroom management does as great a disservice to new teachers as is done by ignoring the subject entirely.

Effective, equitable classroom management is comprised of a particular set of learned professional skills. When classroom management is included as a subtopic in classes on, for instance, curriculum design or child development, it is often given short shrift since the instructors typically have their training in the major topic of the course and not in management. In addition, classroom management has to vie for attention since it is often one more subject that has been added to an already content-heavy syllabus. It is impossible to devote the time necessary to adequately cover the primary topic of a course and still do justice to the subject of classroom management. Typically, the content matter will win out since it is the topic preferred by the professor, while the information about how to manage a classroom well enough to deliver that content receives only cursory attention.

Limited Time Often Emphasizes Quick Management Models

Even the most humanistic of teacher education programs can end up promoting an approach to classroom management that is antithetical to its overall philosophy. If there is only a limited amount of time to discuss classroom management, and teacher educators have expertise in another subject, the most likely management strategies to be covered will be those that can be quickly explained and that are the easiest to implement. To put it bluntly, the management strategies most likely to be covered will be those I cited above—the quick and dirty practices associated with running classrooms on systems of rewards and punishment. Future teachers who are being trained in behaviorist methods are not being challenged to understand that equitable, caring classroom management practices require skills that go far beyond giving misbehaving students the “evil eye” and rewarding compliant

students with points towards a promised popcorn party. Sadly these practices, which can easily be taught when time is short, are, as I stated earlier, the very ones that are most likely to embarrass, discourage, and anger young people.

"What Works" Cannot Be the Standard for Democratic Classroom Management

Respect is critically important to the emotional well being of all young learners, quiet may only be needed by a few. New teachers who are still struggling to get their sense of professional balance may make harmful decisions simply because they do not have the knowledge they need to manage their classrooms in ways that are firm but compassionate. New teachers, when in doubt, often resort to punitive measures as a way to stay in control and to maintain order. Some of them will do whatever it takes to survive, and that standard can often have the most devastating impact on children.

Without attention to issues of management, new teachers enter the field awash in misconceptions. Many believe their "right to teach," as opposed to their professional responsibility to teach, gives them license to say or do anything they want to any student for the sake of an orderly classroom. Recently news stories have reported cases of children who have had their mouths taped or have been put into dark closets by teachers struggling to maintain order in their classrooms. Two notable examples occurred in my state. In the first, a child who lives in a town not far from where I am had his head taped to the wall in an effort to keep him quiet. He had a diagnosed case of Attention Deficit Disorder. In Oakland, California a 5-year-old child was punished for talking by having to lick the blackboard clean. This second child was female and African-American. The primary goal of such appalling

indignities appears to be the creation of young people who obey without question. Such thinking is diametrically opposed to the creation of fully participatory citizens in a democratic society and it flies in the face of what teacher educators know about how learning happens.

If new teachers are recommended for certification when they lack any practical knowledge about how to manage groups of children in ways that will promote equity and sustain safe learning environments, it should not come as a surprise that desperation will lead them to make inappropriate decisions once they have their own classrooms. There may have been a time in education when allowing teachers to enter the field with little or no information about democratic classroom management could have been considered just a bad idea. In today's educational settings, that deficit is nothing short of disastrous for the teachers as well as their students.

New Teachers Reflect Their Preparation Programs

Data reveal appalling high attrition rates for new teachers who are ill prepared. "Studies in Georgia, north Carolina, Michigan, and Virginia, as well as national research, have found that students achieve at higher levels and are less likely to drop out when they are taught by teachers with...greater preparation in methods of teaching." (Darling-Hammond, 2000) And there are correspondingly high suspension, and expulsion rates for students of color, particularly male students, by teachers who are struggling to keep control. (Skiba et al, 2000) It's a bad deal for everyone.

Those who are enrolled in teacher education programs need some time to develop mental frameworks upon which to build their strategies for creating and maintaining equitable and safe classrooms. A rationale as well as the necessary

techniques for managing effectively and equitably are perhaps the most important elements required in order for pre-service teachers to learn, reflect upon and polish the ways they will carry out democratic classroom management.

It is only reasonable to link the performance of teachers, at least in part, to the teacher preparation program from which they come. As teacher educators, we must assume some level of responsibility for the professional decisions our graduates make in the weeks, months, and years that follow their completion of licensure requirements. The better prepared our graduates are, the more likely they will be to experience success in their own classrooms. The more they understand about how to create and sustain equitable and safe learning environments, the more their own students will benefit from their presence.

Faculties in teacher education programs often are hired for their knowledge of specific content areas such as the teaching of reading. Very few programs seek to hire teacher educators who have expertise in classroom management. As an example, The November 24, 2000 issue of *The Chronicle for Higher Education's* "Career Network" section contained 82 ads for Assistant, Associate or Professor rank positions in Education. The advertised positions were described as seeking individuals with expertise in Reading, Social Studies, Educational Psychology and Special Education among others. A few ads were seeking generalists who could teach a variety of subjects. There was no ad in that issue of the Chronicle or in any subsequent issues I've examined that describes a need for someone with expertise in Classroom Management.

As a result of this trend, few doctoral students want to study classroom management as a field unto itself. When I was working with doctoral students, none were interested in having me chair their committees because they wanted to study some aspect of Classroom Management. Instead, they sought me out because of the work I have done writing about issues of diversity. Of course, those writings always centered on the links between diversity and classroom management, but even so, I was never approached by, nor was I able to recruit, a doctoral student to join with me in a study examining management practices. For those of us engaged in the study of democratic classroom management practices, the lack of attention to this critical area of pedagogy is certainly discouraging and even alarming.

It would be naïve to assume that teacher preparation programs are solely responsible for a new teacher's performance. Many factors come into play. Educators carry personal issues with them into their teaching assignments. And schools impart their own cultures through administrators and peer mentors. Although there may be other factors that may influence new teachers, their foundational knowledge and beliefs will inevitably reflect the colleges or universities from which they received their degrees.

Conclusion

As professional educators, it is imperative that we work together to ensure our future teachers have the ability to begin their careers not only knowing what to teach but how to teach as well. Just as no teacher begins a career with the intent of humiliating or intimidating students, so no teacher education program deliberately constructs a course of study to form such graduates. It really comes down to a matter

of time, and how we choose to allot the time available in teacher education programs. The time devoted to helping future teachers develop the skills to manage students in respectful and caring ways must be held as sacred as any moment devoted to academic content.

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